



United States Department of Agriculture
Forest Service



PACIFIC SOUTHWEST REGION

Restoring, Enhancing and Sustaining Forests in California, Hawaii and the Pacific Islands

Sierra National Forest

The French Trail Bass Lake Ranger District

TRAIL HISTORY

What is now called the French Trail began thousands of years ago. The trail follows natural river canyon terrain founded and used for thousands of years by the Mono people. Because of the route's low elevation and western exposure, for most of the winter and within eight miles of the Sierra Nevada crest, it is below the heavy snow line. The Mono regularly used this trail to access the east side of the Sierra, for gatherings, spiritual walks, learning, visiting friends and relatives and to trade for items like obsidian, pinion pine nuts, baskets, games and songs.

In recent history the route was to be the foundation for a Euro American wagon road. In 1879, John French began developing the already well established Native American trade route through the mountains.

Fresno Weekly Expositor, 1879: *A road is being constructed across the mountains from Fresno to Mono County. The road is expected to be completed early next summer.*

With the sudden shutdown of the Mammoth Mining Company and lagging interest and financial support, the trans-Sierra project failed.

THE TRAIL TODAY

Today's trail follows the contours of the San Joaquin River starting at Ross Cabin near Clearwater Fire Station above the town of North Fork. The trail traverses the Ansel Adams Wilderness in the Sierra and Inyo National Forests.

THE SAN JOAQUIN RIVER TRAIL SYSTEM

The 57-mile trail is a large portion of the San Joaquin River Trail system. This system is a combination of historic trails, including the Mammoth Trail, and new trails yet to be constructed. The trail system is designed to begin at Millerton Lake and join the Pacific Crest Trail in the High Sierra near Devils Postpile National Monument. Covering a distance of about 73 miles, the trail would climb Granite Stairway at over 9000 feet in elevation.

The San Joaquin River Trail is being constructed by volunteers for hiking and equestrian use with the cooperation of the Sierra National Forest, Bureau of Land Management, California Department of Parks and Recreation, Nature Conservancy and private land owners.

HIKING THE TRAIL

Practice *Leave No Trace* camping along the trail and be careful with fire. Check ahead for trail and weather conditions. Bring plenty of water and prepare for extreme weather changes. Users will experience steep elevation gains.

Overnight stays in wilderness areas requires a wilderness permit and use of fires and stoves requires a campfire permit. These are available at Forest Service offices. For trail access and information contact the following:

Sierra National Forest
Bass Lake Ranger District
57003 Road 225
North Fork, CA 93643-9734
559-877-2218 ext 0
www.fs.usda.gov/sierra



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